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STATE FOR AF/W, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER-RKANEDA

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [IV](#)
SUBJECT: PATH TO TRANSPARENT ELECTIONS FRAUGHT WITH
POTENTIAL DELAYS AND PITFALLS

REF: A. ABIDJAN 103

[1](#)B. ABIDJAN 51

Classified By: Pol/Econ Section Chief Silvia Eiriz for reasons 1.4 (b/d
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[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Ambassador met on February 19 with Independent Electoral Commission (Commission Electorale Independante - CEI) President Mambe to discuss the status of election preparations. Some progress has been achieved. Mambe told Ambassador all political actors have accepted the 2000 electoral list and have agreed that voters will be able to register with only a birth certificate and will not need a certificate of nationality. But a key step, reconstitution of civil registries, has not begun and the relationship between the technical operator (contractor who will produce the voter ID cards) and government institutions remains unresolved. Mambe told Ambassador that it is not clear that all political actors are committed to holding transparent elections in 2008. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador met on February 19 with CEI President Robert Beugre Mambe to discuss the status of election preparations. Mambe said elections must be held to demonstrate that Cote d'Ivoire can be a functioning democracy and added that the sort of violence that recently afflicted Kenya must be avoided. Ambassador noted the importance of remaining vigilant during the preparations leading to elections. She told Mambe that she does not believe Cote d'Ivoire faces the same problems as Kenya, but agreed that violence is possible in connection with the elections in Cote d'Ivoire.

Pool of Potential Voters

[1](#)3. (SBU) Mambe explained that Ivoirian voters fall into three groups: 1) those on the 2000 electoral list, 2) those who were 18 and over in 2000, but did not register to vote, and 3) those who have turned 18 since 2000. Mambe told Ambassador that all political parties have now accepted the authenticity of the 2000 electoral list. He said that all persons on the 2000 list will have to appear with a birth certificate and be issued an identification/voter registration card. Mambe stated that voters in groups 2 and 3 who have birth documentation can register to vote; and those in groups 2 and 3 whose births were never registered will have to seek recourse from the audiences foraines, but will be able to register with a jugement suppletif. No nationality certificate will be needed. Mambe was unable to provide a figure for how many persons this might represent. Therefore, the audiences foraines process must finish before the voter registration can begin. Mambe confirmed that all

111 audiences foraines teams have been deployed. Under current planning, the audiences foraines should end their work by the end of April at the latest.

14. (SBU) Mambe noted that the issue of documents for voters in all three groups whose births were registered, but who have lost their documents, will be addressed by the reconstitution of the civil registries. Mambe said this process has not begun since agreement has not yet been reached on how the reconstitution will be carried out. Mambe explained that the Ministries of Interior and Justice have joint responsibility for this process and said it is possible to complete the reconstitution in approximately 2 months. A lack of sufficient judges (See Reftel A) could be contributing to the government's delay in beginning this process, but Mambe was not certain if this is indeed the reason for the delay.

15. (C) Mambe said unequivocally that there is agreement by all political actors that Ivoirians will be able to register to vote by showing only birth certification and that no one will be asked to produce a certificate of nationality to register to vote. Mambe explained that once the draft electoral list is published, it will be possible for individuals to challenge the citizenship of others on the list.

Mechanics of Organizing the Election

16. (SBU) Mambe said the Prime Minister's office and the CEI have agreed on revisions to the legal framework governing the elections, but that the Prime Minister must now obtain the approval of the rest of the government. He explained that modifications to the electoral code have been proposed to permit the gathering of biometric data from voters and to

allow the CEI to unilaterally decide on technical specifications for electoral materials.

17. (C) Mambe told Ambassador that the operating guidelines for the technical operator, French company SAGEM, have not yet been agreed upon. According to the OPA, SAGEM is to work on the identification operation, voter registration, and the production of voter cards. Mambe explained that once the operating guidelines are agreed upon, the government must enter into a contract with SAGEM and make a first payment of about USD 30 million. Mambe confirmed that operating guidelines have not yet been agreed upon because there is still disagreement about the working relationship between SAGEM, CEI, and the National Institute of Statistics (Institut National de la Statistique - INS). He explained that the Ouagadougou Political Agreement (OPA) states that SAGEM and the INS will work together to establish the electoral list under the oversight of the CEI. Mambe told Ambassador that the CEI has proposed that CEI, INS, SAGEM, the National Office of Identification (Office National d'Identification - ONI) and the National Supervisory Commission on Identification (Commission Nationale de Supervision de l'Identification - CNSI) all have representatives at voter registration sites. According to Mambe, the CEI has suggested that CEI, SAGEM, and INS publish the draft electoral list and that the CEI examine comments on the draft list and pass them on to INS and SAGEM for publication of the final electoral list. Mambe said the CEI has also suggested that SAGEM and INS produce the voter cards and that CEI distribute them.

18. (C) Mambe said there will be 11,000 polling stations and 20,000 to 22,000 voting booths. He noted that observers, who will have to go through an accreditation process, will be permitted at polling stations and that transparent elections are technically possible in October or November. He told the Ambassador that if all political players agree to hold elections earlier even if not all eligible voters have received the documentation needed to register to vote, the CEI would have to accept that decision. He added that the CEI will not agree to such a scenario if any political party

opposes it. Mambe stated that CEI has responsibility for ensuring security for the election and through the Integrated Command Center (Centre de Commandement Integre - CCI) will work with the UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI), the French "Licorne" troops, and the Ministry of Defense.

Political Will -----

¶9. (C) Ambassador asked Mambe if the necessary political will exists to hold elections in 2008. Mambe candidly responded that while publicly all political actors are calling for elections, in private it is not so clear that all actors are committed to holding transparent elections and that some seem concerned about being able to remain in power. Mambe added that some players clearly benefit from the continuation of the status quo.

¶10. (C) Comment. Emboffs were impressed with the degree to which the CEI has laid out all the various steps that should be taken to ensure a transparent election. Mambe's briefing was thorough and extremely well organized. The briefing also drove home, however, the fact that there are dozens of steps that remain to be taken before the elections and that a delay in any number of them could force a postponement of the elections. For example, as long as the operating guidelines for SAGEM remain unresolved, the registration and documentation of voters cannot begin. It will likely be several months before the reconstitution of civil registries process begins, meaning that many voters will not have the documents they need to register until this summer. SAGEM will need to deploy equipment throughout the country and train personnel on how to use it. Even if the political will to hold elections this year continues to be present, meeting the technical requirements for a credible election will be a challenge.

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